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RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 1125  
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SUBJECT: GREEN PASSPORTS, RED HEARTS? KOREANS IN JAPAN

REF: A) 1989 STATE 403761 B) 06 OSAKA 00238 C) 06 TOKYO 00841

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Ethnic Korean permanent residents in Japan are increasingly switching from GOJ-issued travel documents to ROK passports. The ease with which ethnic Koreans can change nationality makes it difficult to assess ties to the DPRK and apply visa clearance requirements. As this trend continues, it may become nearly impossible to assess these ties, particularly as the ROK no longer requires ethnic Koreans in Japan to renounce membership in pro-North Korean organizations to obtain a passport. End Summary.

Ethnic Koreans at Home in Osaka  
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¶2. (U) Japanese permanent residents of Korean descent account for 16.9 percent of Post's third-country national visa applicants and pose unique issues for interviewing officers. The Osaka-Kobe consular district is home to about half of Japan's ethnic Korean minority, which totals between 515,000 and 900,000 people, depending on how the group is defined. Descended from Koreans who arrived during the colonial period and earlier, the 650,000 Koreans who remained after the second World War lost their claim to Japanese citizenship and were officially registered as nationals of "Chosen," (Korean: phonetic Cho-sen) the Japanese name for the Korean peninsular kingdom before annexation. When the North and South divided in 1948, Chosen nationals were allowed to voluntarily re-register as nationals of the newly created Republic of Korea, but those on the political left typically chose to maintain Chosen registration, the choice being mainly a reflection of ideology rather than of a family's place of origin on the Korean peninsula. An estimated 50,000 Chosen nationals currently live in Japan, 40,000 of whom are in Post's consular district.

¶3. (SBU) How to classify nationality Q as ROK, DPRK or something else - is the main issue the Chosen group presents in the context of visa adjudication, with implications for visa validity and whether special processing is required. While the term "Chosen" has gradually become associated with North Korea, this was not a choice actively made by the Chosen population itself or often even by their parents' generation.

The travel document they most often carry is one issued by the Japanese Ministry of Justice that classifies the bearer as nationals of Chosen Q a country that does not exist. PostQs current practice is to classify bearers of these documents as XXX "Stateless," as this best fits the historical reality and distinguishes them from the relatively few holders of actual DPRK passports that we see (ref A).

#### The Lure of ROK Nationality

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¶4. (U) Complicating the picture, the Chosen community has been steadily shifting from GOJ-issued travel documents to South Korean passports since the beginning of this decade, with the trend accelerating in recent years. In 2002, nationwide nearly 12,000 ethnic Korean permanent residents of Japan changed to ROK passports following DPRK's admission of involvement in abductions of Japanese citizens (ref B), and a representative of the Chosen community in Post's district reports that the figure has been around 4000 a year since that peak. Post's experience on the visa line tracks with this trend: whereas in 1998 Post issued approximately 1,700 visas to holders of GOJ-issued travel documents, Post issued only 55 to this group in 2006, and the figure fell further to 31 last year. Correspondingly, the Mission has noted an increase in applicants who have recently switched to ROK passports (ref C).

¶5. (U) Line officers have found that ease of travel is the reason ethnic Korean applicants most often cite for switching from one travel document to another. GOJ-

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issued Chosen travel document holders were largely barred from travel outside Japan until the early 1980s, and the travel documents still do not afford the same ease of travel as ROK passports. Schengen visas, for example, may only be issued to passport holders. Manifesting the barriers this group has to surmount in order to travel internationally, it is not uncommon to find applicants who hold multiple types of travel documents. Typically these will be a DPRK passport and a GOJ-issued travel document, but Post has also encountered applicants in possession of both a DPRK and an ROK passport. These applicants rarely present any evidence of allegiance to either the ROK or DPRK and do not appear to view holding both passports as contradictory.

#### Shifting Identities: The New "Ko-ri-ans"

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¶6. (SBU) In addition to ease of travel, the shift in travel document preference accompanies a relatively recent evolution in how ethnic Korean permanent residents choose to self-identify. Whereas in the past the term "Chosen" was popular, members are now much more likely to call themselves "Ko-ri-an," using the Japanese pronunciation of the English word. This change reflects a recognition that has become more conscious in recent years of a collective identity separate from that of both Japan and the two Koreas. A backlash against DPRK misconduct, particularly the abductions issue, is also a major source of this change (ref B).

#### Assessing DPRK Ties

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¶7. (SBU) The shift to ROK passports has made assessing ties to the DPRK much more difficult. Before the shift away from GOJ-issued Chosen travel documents reached its current extreme, line officers could rely on possession of an ROK passport as an indicator of a lack

of DPRK ties. Now officers must be more discerning in evaluating ROK passport holders for clearance purposes. Good indicators of potential ties to the DPRK include a recent switch to an ROK passport, graduation from Chosen schools, self-employment, lack of a Japanese alias, and travel to China (often an indicator of transit to DPRK). Active participation in Chosen membership groups such as the "Chosen Soren" (General Association of Korean Residents in Japan) and the "Chosen Shoko Kaigisho" (Korean Resident Business Association) is also considered a good indicator of potential DPRK ties.

18. (SBU) Comment. As the ethnic Korean applicant pool continues to exhibit changes in national identity, the need for an interview in order to determine how to apply visa clearance requirements has become ever more apparent. Only just over one percent of PostQs ethnic Korean visa applicants was found to require clearances in 2007, yet within this one percent the ROK passport holders actually outnumbered the travel document holders. According to Post contacts, even leaders of the Chosen membership groups are switching to ROK passports since they are no longer required by the Korean consulate to renounce Chosen membership to do so. As the day approaches when ROK nationals no longer need a visa interview, it may become impossible to determine the necessity for a clearance at all. End Comment.

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